

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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INFO AMEMBASSY ANKARA

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AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN

AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

AMEMBASSY LISBON

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG

AMEMBASSY OSLO

AMEMBASSY OTTAWA

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY REYKJAVIK

AMEMBASSY ROME

USMISSION NATO

USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN GE

C O N F I D E N T I A L BRUSSELS 7818

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: NATO, MILI, AWACS, BE

SUBJECT: BELGIAN PARTICIPATION IN PROCUREMENT PHASE OF NATO

AIRBORNE EARLY WARNING (AEW)

REF: STATE 196324

SUMMARY: IN RESPONSE TO REFTTEL, WE SUGGEST BELOW BEST
APPROACH WHICH COULD BE MADE TO BELGIANS. TO SECURE THEIR
COMMITMENT TO PARTICIPATE IN PROCUREMENT PHASE OF NATO AEW
SYSTEM. WE ALSO NOTE DIFFICULTIES WHICH WILL HAVE TO BE OVERCOME
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TO REVERSE PRESENT BELGIAN POSITION NOT TO PARTICIPATE. END

SUMMARY.

1. PRESENT BELGIAN OPPOSITION TO PARTICIPATION IN NATO AEW SYSTEM IS BASED ENTIRELY ON LACK OF AVAILABLE FUNDING IN DEFENSE BUDGET, NOT ON TECHNICAL OR STRATEGIC DOUBTS RE NEED FOR SUCH A SYSTEM.

2. THE BELGIAN MINISTER OF DEFENSE HIMSELF DECIDED IN EARLY 1975 THAT THE MOD LACKED SUFFICIENT FUNDS AND/OR THE POSSIBILITY OF OBTAINING ADDITIONAL FUNDS TO PARTICIPATE IN A NATO AEW SYSTEM. BELGIAN AIR FORCE OUTSMARTED ITSELF BY NOT PRESSING FOR A FAVORABLE DECISION OUT OF FEARS THE AEW SYSTEM WOULD HAVE TO BE FUNDED OUT OF ITS OWN BUDGET. THE BAF CONTINUES TO SUPPORT THE AEW SYSTEM CONCEPT. THE BELGIAN MOD HAS REMAINED INTERESTED IN THE AEW SYSTEM AND HAS CONTINUED TO RECEIVE ALL INFORMATION MADE AVAILABLE THROUGH NATO CHANNELS. BELGIUM HAS IN FACT, RECENTLY REJOINED THE CNAD HIGH LEVEL GROUP TO DISCUSS AEW. OTHER MINISTRIES HAVE NOT QUESTIONED THE MOD DECISION AND ALL NATO AEW ACTIVITY REMAINS WITHIN THE MOD.

3. THE BELGIAN AEW DECISION WAS MADE IN LIGHT OF DECISIONS TO INVEST HEAVILY IN THREE PROGRAMS WHICH RECEIVED HIGHER PRIORITY: (A) THE F-16; (B) THE AIFV; AND (C) FRIGATES. IT WAS TAKEN DURING A PERIOD OF THE MOST SERIOUS ECONOMIC DIFFICULTIES IN BELGIUM SINCE WORLD WAR II AND THE BELGIAN ECONOMY HAS NOT YET SHOWN SIGNS OF SIGNIFICANT RECOVERY. IN FACT, ALL BELGIAN MINISTRIES HAVE WITHIN THE PAST MONTH BEEN REQUIRED TO PARE THEIR PRESENT BUDGETS IN ORDER TO PERMIT A TEN PERCENT REDUCTION IN THE TOTAL GOVERNMENT BUDGET. THIS WAS ONE OF THE FACTORS BEHIND THE RECENT RESIGNATION OF A MINISTER (BRUSSELS 7627). LONGER RANGE BELGIAN DEFENSE PLANNING (DPQ 76) HAS NOT INDICATED ANY INTENT TO ALLOCATE FUNDS FOR A NATO AEW SYSTEM.

4. THE ISSUE IS THUS THE DIRECT RESPONSIBILITY ALONE OF MINISTER OF DEFENSE VANDEN BOEYNANTS AND HE IS THE KEY FIGURE WHO MUST CHANGE THE POLICY ACCEPTED BY THE BELGIAN GOVERNMENT. WE BELIEVE THAT THE MEANS MOST LIKELY TO EFFECT SUCH A CHANGE IS A DIRECT APPROACH TO HIM BY SECDEF RUMSFELD. WE RECOMMEND THAT CONSIDERATION BE GIVEN TO A RUMSFELD TO VANDEN BOEYNANTS

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LETTER FOLLOWED UP IF NECESSARY WITH A DIRECT PERSONAL APPEAL AT THE OCTOBER MEETING OF DEFENSE MINISTERS. WE SUGGEST THAT IF THIS APPROACH IS DECIDED UPON, WE BE TASKED WITH DELIVERY OF THE SECDEF MESSAGE WHICH WOULD PERMIT US TO SUPPLEMENT ITS ARGUMENTS WITH OUR OWN.

5. WE RECOMMEND THE FOLLOWING APPROACH FOR A SECDEF LETTER:
(A) STRESS THE NEED FOR AS MANY NATO COUNTRIES AS POSSIBLE

TO PARTICIPATE IN THE NATO AEW SYSTEM IN ORDER TO DEMONSTRATE THE COMMON WILL OF ALL BOTH LARGE AND SMALL.

(B) SAY THAT THE ABSENCE OF SMALLER NATO MEMBERS FROM THE PROCUREMENT PHASE OF THE NATO AEW SYSTEM WILL IN ALL LIKELIHOOD KILL THE PROGRAM, AS THE LARGER NATO MEMBERS CANNOT GO AHEAD BY THEMSELVES FOR INTERNAL POLITICAL REASONS.

(C) NOT THAT POSSIBLE PARTICIPATION BY SMALLER NATO MEMBERS IN THE OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE PHASE OF THE PROGRAM IS NOT SUFFICIENT AS THAT STAGE MAY NEVER BE REACHED WITHOUT THEIR PARTICIPATION IN THE PROCUREMENT PHASE.

(D) STAY AWAY FROM MENTION OF A "FAIR SHARE" OF COSTS AND REMAIN FLEXIBLE IN BOTH THE AMOUNTS OF FUNDING NECESSARY AND IN THE TIMING FOR SUCH SPENDING.

(E) STRESS THE NATO INTEREST IN THE PROGRAM, DOWNPLAYING THE DIRECT US INTEREST.

(F) AVOID REPEATING ARGUMENTS ALREADY USED WITH WHICH THE BELGIANS ARE ALREADY FAMILIAR AND WHICH HAVE NOT CONVINCED THEM.

(G) REQUEST VANDEN BOEYNANTS TO IDENTIFY BELGIUM'S INDUSTRIAL SELF INTEREST SHOULD IT PARTICIPATE SO THAT APPROPRIATE CONSIDERATION CAN BE GIVEN TO PROVIDING CONTRACTS TO BELGIAN INDUSTRY.

6. PREVIOUS EMBASSY REPORTING ON THIS SUBJECT (75 BRUSSELS 1972, 75 BRUSSELS 10619, BRUSSELS 1964, BRUSSELS 3307 AND BRUSSELS 5335) HAS INDICATED THAT WE ARE UP AGAINST A STONE WALL. OUR SUGGESTIONS IN PARAS 4 AND 5 ABOVE ARE DESIGNED TO STIMULATE NEW THINKING ON THE PART OF THE KEY BELGIAN FIGURE INVOLVED, USING THE PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WHICH HAS DEVELOPED BETWEEN HIM AND SECDEF RUMSFELD. NO LESSER EFFORT IF APT TO BEAR FRUIT. RENNER

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